

VZCZCXRO1713

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK

DE RUEHGB #2783/01 2421254

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 291254Z AUG 08

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9125

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 002783

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/24/2018

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PTER I2

SUBJECT: SUNNI SHEIKHS FEELING EXCLUDED FROM THE PROCESS

REF: BAGHDAD 02590

Classified By: POLMINCONS ROBERT S. FORD. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Many Sunni tribal views of the GOI are defined by perceptions of corruption, and the belief that political and sectarian motives drive a Shi'a-dominated government that utilizes the Iraqi Security Forces (both police and military) as a political tool. Sunni tribal contacts are generally opposed to any early withdrawal of U.S. forces, which they see as a critical buffer between themselves and a sectarian GOI. The sheikhs also claim that there is little integration or reconciliation at the national level. (We also hear, meanwhile, from top Shia leaders in government that they are either dubious of the utility of reabsorbing Sahwa/SOI fighters into security and job-training programs or they lack the resources to go very far. The Prime Minister has expressed support for transition, but we haven't heard any of his top aides do so.) Finally, the Sunni Arab tribes share the general public's disappointment with the government's failure to deliver services, with some groups in Anbar and in Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad contemplating alternative routes to meet community needs. The tribes are themselves subject to political fissures which may inhibit their potential as agents of security and political development. END SUMMARY.

Legitimate Security Concerns or Shakedown?

¶12. (C) The theme of security is a leitmotif among several Sunni tribal leaders and their communities. In the last two weeks, poloffs have met with more than 35 Sunni tribal leaders and political leaders -- primarily from Baghdad, its western suburbs and Anbar, but also from Basrah, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ta'mim. All expressed to poloffs strong concerns about a precipitous U.S. troop withdrawal. Each averred that the improved security situation was a result of the tribes' efforts (Sahwa and Sons of Iraq (SOI)). They maintained that an early withdrawal of U.S. forces would worsen the security situation, allowing not only a resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), but also Jaysh Al Mahdi (JAM) and increased Iranian activity. Sheikh Abdulazim al-Tai'e (Basrah) stated large numbers of insurgents who went to Iran were beginning to return, many bringing weapons with them. Sheikh al Tai'e also claimed these groups were responsible for assassinations in the region. Most of the tribal leaders, including Sheikh Ali Hatem, a self-identified leader of the Al Dulaymi Confederation, claimed that the GOI is pursuing sectarian aims and targeting SOI/Sahwa for arrest and assassination. Sheikh Ali Hatem predicted to us on August 17 that if the Americans withdrew precipitously from the International Zone, Sunni Arab fighters would quickly launch new attacks on the Iraqi government to bring it down.

¶13. (C) On August 19, 22 disgruntled Sahwa leaders from Anbar, Basrah, Diyala, Ta'mim and Baghdad Provinces met with poloffs

to voice their concerns. Led by Sheikh Wissam al Hardan, a self-described "engineer" of the Awakening Movement in Anbar, the sheikhs complained that they led, and still were leading, the fight against AQI and terrorism. They claimed that they were the heart of the Sahwa, but they were receiving neither recognition nor reward as MNF-I resources were being hoarded by "crooks" like Ahmed Abu Risha (brother of murdered Sahwa founder Abd al-Sattar Abu Risha). Moreover, they asserted that unless given a fair share, their tribesmen, who have made huge personal sacrifices and seen little reward, will revert back to insurgency in Anbar.

4) (C) Sheikhs Hatim al-Ithawi and Salih Nasser al-Ithawi claimed that one of the SOI groups in Doura was using CF funds to pay AQI to attack other SoI groups in the area. They also warned that AQI sleeper cells in Anbar were still present in the province and waiting for a propitious time to reactivate. Muhammad Hatim al-Samarra'i (Samarra) claimed that Samarra was occupied by militia and MOI forces, and requested CF intervention. (Comment: The allegations of AQI and Iranian influences have been passed on to MNF-West for further investigations, but the sheikhs' criticism of Abu Risha, and their other grievances are no doubt colored by local rivalries, inter-tribal jealousy, and competition for CF resources. There has been some political maneuvering for power and influence with the tribes among several of the leaders, inter alia Sheikh Ali al Fares, Sheikh Ali Hatem, Sheikh Wissam al Hardan, and Abu Risha. Some of these disagreements extend back to the establishment of the Awakening movements. End Comment.)

BAGHDAD 00002783 002 OF 003

The View from the Other Side) GOI views of Sunni Sheikhs

¶5. (C) We have not heard much positive about the Sunni tribal leaders from the Iraqi leadership. An Iraqi Army colonel told Poloff August 21 that many of the SOI were criminals and terrorists (Note: Apparently any arrest is reason to refuse entry of any SOI into Iraqi Security Forces. End Note.) To buttress his point, he showed a grisly video of an alleged AQI member, now allegedly in SOI, beheading over a bathtub a Shia Iraqi accused of helping Coalition Forces. Minister of Interior Bolani told us earlier this week that the Interior Ministry had hired as many Sahwa tribesmen into Interior ranks as it was going to. He urged that the Americans press for no more. On August 21, Sadik Rikabi, an influential political advisor to Prime Minister Maliki, pointedly rejected PolMinCouns' recommendation that the GoI move forward expeditiously with the Sahwa transition from MNF-I control to Iraqi control. The Americans, he claimed, had created a problem whereby &terrorists8 were being rewarded financially and now the U.S. is asking the Iraqi government to reward them while ignoring its (GOI's) own desperately poor political supporters. He was not interested in discussing vocational training programs. Press spokesman Ali Debbagh who was sitting with us whispered after Rikabi excused himself that the Prime Minister's office was not concerned about integrating Sahwa fighters back into mainstream Iraqi society.

Transition and Re-Integration - Or the Lack thereof

¶5. (C) There is a clear link between security and integration of Sahwa/SOI into the ISF and Sunni tribal members into the economic and political processes writ large. On August 14, approximately a dozen sheikhs and 150 members of the Sunni community gathered at the Baghdad headquarters of the Independent National Tribal Gathering, led by Sheikh Omar al-Jabouri. Addressing the group, Sheikh Al-Jabouri said Iraqi tribes came together to stop a sectarian bloodbath instigated by Persian (sic) agents in Iraq . Al-Jabouri

wondered why the Iraqi government was not directing resources to help the tribes in areas like hiring and refugee resettlement after the tribes helped fight terrorism. Sheikh Al Jabouri also indicated his and his followers' mistrust of the GOI's efforts at transitioning and integrating Sahwa/SOI into ISF. Other Sunni tribal leaders echoed this point. Several sheikhs claim they and their "sons" are being targeted for arrest and/or assassination. Another Sunni tribal leader in the Anbar SOI fled to Jordan after the Iraqi Army issued an arrest warrant for him. Shaykh Samir ash-Shammarai'e from Baghdad on August 18 bitterly decried what he claimed was abuse of Sunni Arab prisoners in Iraqi detention facilities and urged the Americans to intervene to stop it. Sheik Ali Hatem complained to Emboffs in a separate meeting that the GOI was discriminating against the Sahwa/SOI and insisted that their contracts should not be turned over to the GOI.

¶6. (C) Our Sunni tribal interlocutors' perceptions of the ISF toward transition and integration, like security, are defined increasingly by the perceived political/sectarian preferences of the GOI. According to Sheikh Mashfi, requests to meet with President Jalal al Talabani and Vice President Tariq al Hashimi have gone unanswered; the GOI remains unresponsive to tribal overtures. Sheikh Mashfi Al Azawi from Baghdad (INTG) pointed out to us on August 18 that when members of his tribe and other Sunni tribes applied for jobs with Iraqi Security Forces, the government refused to hire them even though they had been vetted through a clearance process. Sheikh Mashfi el-Azzawi also complained that AQI has stepped up its targeting of Sahwa tribal leaders but no one is helping them. Indeed, he claimed that American forces had reduced their presence on the streets and were not keeping their word to help Sunni tribesmen gain slots in the Iraqi Security Forces.

(Comment: In fact, the GOI has said they will accept approximately 17,000 SOI into the security forces, and approximately 3,000 have been transitioned, but the Sunni sheikhs want many more than the 17,000. End Comment.)

Sheikhs, Parties, and Elections

¶7. (C) There is also clear tension between many of the Sunni tribal leaders and the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Ali Hatem bitterly criticized the IIP officials in Anbar's provincial council and governorate whom he accused of corruption and gross mismanagement of resources dedicated to providing

BAGHDAD 00002783 003 OF 003

services to the Anbar population. Another Anbari tribal sheikh, Ali Fares, predicted to us on August 14 that the angry Anbari tribesfolk would sweep the IIP from office if there are provincial elections. Sheikh Ali Hatem said that CF have done much more for Anbar's development than the IIP ever did. (Comment: IIP officials in Baghdad, meanwhile, admit that there have been huge problems with Anbar governance, but they contend that the party's relations with the tribes are not so bad. End Comment.)

¶8. (C) At the same time, many of our interlocutors either did not focus on or were reluctant to discuss elections. While the al Jabouri gathering was essentially a political convention, the speech topics included security, reconciliation, detainees, widows and orphans, and services. The election, as a topic, was not addressed. The 22-sheikh delegation was focused only on SOI, and grievances with the GOI. Meanwhile, we found Sunni tribal leaders from West Baghdad reluctant to talk about elections; they were either nervous to talk or disinterested in the topic. Sheikh Ali Hatem on August 17 contradicted himself, saying first that the elections did not matter, then later saying IIP would be swept out of office. The president of the Association of University Lecturers (2800 members), Dr. Ahmed Kamal, when pushed, finally said that elections don't matter, except to the political parties who want to stay in power. On a

walk-about in the Kadra district of West Baghdad, a medical student, a shop owner, and an electrician said that elections were not so important though they would probably vote, but they expected no change to result.

GOI Unresponsive with Necessary Services

¶9. (C) Like security, Sunni tribal opinions of services from the local and national government also is defined by perceived corruption and political/sectarian patronage. Many of the sheikhs we met indicated that the GOI is unresponsive to requests from their area. (Comment: Their areas were mostly Anbar. Service delivery anywhere in Iraq is still very problematic. End Comment.) In the West Baghdad district of Mansour, the various leaders were pleased with security gains, but said that there still was insufficient electricity, water and fuel. Fuel was especially important because it enables electricity entrepreneurs to run gasoline or diesel generators and sell the electricity to residents and shop owners. One owner of a generator says he buys his gas on the black market because the government station never has gas and won't sell to him anyway. In this district, however, a new mechanism for obtaining services has emerged. Several sheikhs and local leaders have formed a "Support Council" (SC). Composed of equal numbers of Sunni and Shia, the SC plays an ombudsman role - interceding on behalf of the District and Neighborhood Councils (DCs/NCs) with the central government and the Iraqi Army units in the area. While most of the interactions currently deal with internally displaced persons (IDPs), the SC also uses its influence to obtain services for the districts, because the NCs and DCs are perceived as ineffectual.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: The national imperatives of security, integration and transition of the SOI are intertwined. While there has been significant progress on the security front, the lack of meaningful integration of Sahwa/SOI into the ISF and Sunni tribal members into more general economic, political and security roles may undermine the genuine achievements in security. The integration of the Sunni Sahwa and the Sons of Iraq forces into the ISF would be a major step toward long-term accommodation between Sunni communities and the central government. However, one thing remains clear among this particular group of Iraqis. The lack of progress on integration into other areas of society, and the lack of improved services, are all contributing to a simmering discontent that feeds disenchantment with the political process and potential instability. We have heard Prime Minister Maliki express his support for transition programs for Sunni Arab fighters, but we haven't heard any of his top aides echo that sentiment. END COMMENT

BUTENIS